

# An undescribed subspecies of Rudd's Apalis

## *Apalis ruddi* from southern Malawi

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Hitherto Rudd's Apalis *Apalis ruddi* has only been known in a peculiarly limited distribution in northern Zululand and southern Moçambique and in adjacent Swaziland (Hall & Moreau 1970: 181, Clancey 1966: 481, 1971: 50), with Vilanculos ( $21^{\circ} 59' \text{ S}$ ,  $35^{\circ} 19' \text{ E}$ ) as the northernmost locality (Clancey 1971: 50, 162). Benson & Benson (1977) make no mention of it reaching southern Malawi, as a possibility even, though they suggest the possible occurrence there of 3 other species with an essentially lowland coastal distribution, viz. *Lamprotornis corruscus*, *Anthreptes reichenowi* and *Nectarinia veroxii*. (Examples of other lowland species which have already occurred are *Batis fratum* and *Malaconotus viridis*.) It is therefore of outstanding interest to record the occurrence of *Apalis ruddi* at Nchalo, lower Shire Valley some 640 km almost due north of Vilanculos (see vegetation map in Wild & Fernandes 1967). The single specimen retained, of 3 recognised (see later), is considered sufficiently distinct to merit designation by name:—

### *Apalis ruddi caniviridis* subsp. nov.

*Description* (colour references, Ridgway 1912): Nearest to *A. r. ruddi* Grant, but crown slightly more bluish, rest of upperparts more greyish, less yellow-green (Dull Citrine, pl. xvi, v. Citrine, pl. iv). Underparts no different. Upper surface of wings with ground greyer, less yellowish (citrine) green: likewise of tail, colder and greyer, less yellowish (citrine) green, but no appreciable difference in the yellow apical spotting. Iris noted at time of collecting as deep red (perhaps nearest Maroon or Claret Brown, pl. i), as against brown in *A. r. ruddi*. No apparent difference in size.

The name *caniviridis* (greyish green) is an allusion to the greyer green back and greyer tint to the ground of both wings and tail.

*Distribution*: Only known from Nchalo ( $16^{\circ} 16' \text{ S}$ ,  $34^{\circ} 55' \text{ E}$ ), lower Shire Valley, Malawi, at 60 m above sea-level.

*Type*: Museum of Malawi No. MMB. 549, adult ♂, found recently dead by Mrs D. B. Hanmer on 21 December 1977.

*Measurements and weight of Type*: Wing (flattened) 48, tail 47.5, culmen from skull 15, tarsus 19.5 mm, weight 10.2 g.

*Material examined*: The type has been compared with 7 specimens of *A. r. ruddi* from the plains of Moçambique from the mouth of the Limpopo River northwards in Sul do Save and 3 of the very distinct *A. r. fumosa* Clancey (1966: 481) in the Durban Museum.

*Other remarks*: Two other individuals similar in plumage to the type of *A. r. caniviridis* have been netted at Nchalo since I started working there in 1973, but had to be released. Their particulars were as follows (external sexing seemingly impossible):— 2 Jan 1978, wing 49, tail 53 mm, weight 9.6 g; 3 Apr 1978, wing 50, tail 52 mm, weight 9.8 g. The January specimen had the iris light brown, not deep red, and was probably immature. A fourth bird with a red eye, was seen on 14 Jul 1978 in a guava tree in my garden.

The first bird was found dead on the edge of dense thicket (cf. Benson & Benson 1977: 22) after an insecticide spraying operation, while the other two birds were caught in, and released from, nets set up in the open, but with dense thicket only some 2 m distant on either side. This is almost certainly its true local habitat, in which it must be very sparse, and the reason why it has remained undiscovered since ornithological exploration started in the lower Shire Valley more than a century ago (Benson & Benson 1977: 220). Further south, the habitat of *A. r. ruddi* seems very similar, and it likewise is very sparse (Clancey 1971: 50). Possibly the 2 populations are by no means as widely sundered as might be supposed from present knowledge and in this respect the relatively small scale map of Wild & Fernandes (1967) may be misleading. However, P. A. Clancey suggests that the new race may be restricted to the relatively dry country of the southern Shire Valley and the adjacent Tete District of Moçambique, being more or less cut off from southern populations by the *Brachystegia* country of Manica and Sofala.

The sparseness of *A. ruddi* might be explained as unsuccessful competition with *A. flavida*, as suggested by Hall & Moreau (1970: 181), and since 48 *A. flavida* have been ringed at Nchalo since 1973, this may be the case. Also, the almost complete clearance of woodland and thicket in the lower Shire Valley outside protected areas may have caused a movement of thicket dwelling species into areas where they did not previously occur. Several have been caught recently at Nchalo, which almost certainly did not occur there previously:— e.g., *Turtur afer*, *T. tympanistria*, *Cercococcyx montanus*, *Apaloderma narina*, *Merops boehmi*, *Malaconotus viridis* and *Trochocercus cyanomelas*, although not all of them have remained there to breed.

Hall & Moreau suggest that *ruddi* has a hybrid derivation from *A. thoracica* and *A. flavida*, but C. W. Benson and M. P. Stuart Irwin agree that, on the basis of an examination of museum specimens, it is derived from *flavida*.

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